AN

ELEGY

ON A

PILE OF RUINS.

By J. CUNNINGHAM.

ASPICE MURORUM MOLES, PRÆRUPTAQUE SAXA!

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E L E G Y

BRITISH MUSEUM

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AN

ELEGY

ON A

PILE OF RUINS.

I.

IN the full proſpect yonder hill commands,
O'er foreſts, fields, and vernal-coated plains;
The veſtige of an ancient abbey ſtands,
Cloſe by a ruin'd caſtle's rude remains.

II.

Half buried, there, lie many a broken buſt,
And obeliſk, and urn, o'erthrown by TIME;
And many a cherub, here, deſcends in duſt
From the rent roof, and portico ſublime.

III.

The rivulets, oft frighted at the ſound
Of fragments, tumbling from the tow'rs on high;
Plunge to their ſource in ſecret caves profound,
Leaving their banks and pebbly bottoms dry.

IV.

Where rev'rend ſhrines in Gothic grandeur ſtood,
The nettle, or the noxious night-ſhade, ſpreads;
And aſhlings, wafted from the neighb'ring wood,
Through the worn turrets wave their trembling heads.

V.

V.

There Contemplation, to the crowd unknown,
Her attitude compos'd, and aſpect ſweet!
Sits muſing on a monumental ſtone,
And points to the MEMENTO at her feet.

VI.

Soon as ſage ev'ning check'd day's ſunny pride,
I left the mantling ſhade, in moral mood;
And ſeated by the maid's ſequeſter'd ſide,
Thus ſigh'd, the mould'ring ruins as I view'd.

VII.

Inexorably calm, with ſilent pace
Here TIME has paſs'd—What ruin marks his way!
This pile, now crumbling o'er its hallow'd baſe,
Turn'd not his ſtep, nor could his courſe delay.

VIII.

Religion rais'd her ſupplicating eyes
In vain; and Melody, her ſong ſublime:
In vain, Philoſophy, with maxims wiſe,
Would touch the cold unfeeling heart of TIME.

IX.

Yet the hoar tyrant, tho' not mov'd to ſpare,
Relented when he ſtruck its finiſh'd pride;
And partly the rude ravage to repair,
The tott'ring tow'rs with twiſted Ivy tied.

X.

How ſolemn is the cell o'ergrown with moſs,
That terminates the view, yon cloiſter'd way!
In the cruſh'd wall, a time-corroded croſs,
Religion like, ſtands mould'ring in decay!

XI.

Where the mild ſun, through ſaint-encypher'd glaſs,
Illum'd with mellow light that brown-brow'd iſle;
Many rapt hours might Meditation paſs,
Slow moving 'twixt the pillars of the pile!

XII.

And Piety, with myſtic-meaning beads,
Bowing to ſaints on ev'ry ſide inurn'd,
Trod oft the ſolitary path, that leads
Where, now, the ſacred altar lies o'erturn'd!

XIII.

Through the grey grove, between thoſe with'ring trees,
'Mongſt a rude group of monuments, appears
A marble-imag'd matron on her knees,
Half waſted, like a Niobe in tears:

XIV.

Low levell'd in the duſt her darling's laid!
Death pity'd not the pride of youthful bloom;
Nor could maternal piety diſſuade,
Or ſoften the fell tyrant of the tomb.

XV.

The relicks of a mitred ſaint may reſt,
Where, mould'ring in the niche, his ſtatue ſtands;
Now nameleſs, as the crowd that kiſs'd his veſt,
And crav'd the benediction of his hands.

XVI.

Near the brown arch, redoubling yonder gloom,
The bones of an illuſtrious Chieftain lie;
As trac'd upon the time-unletter'd tomb,
The trophies of a broken fame imply.

XVII.

Ah! what avails, that o'er the vaſſal plain,
His rights and rich demeſnes extended wide!
That honour, and her knights, compos'd his train,
And chivalry ſtood marſhall'd by his ſide!

XVIII.

Tho' to the clouds his caſtle ſeem'd to climb,
And frown'd defiance on the deſp'rate foe;
Tho' deem'd invincible, the conqueror, TIME,
Levell'd the fabrick, as the founder, low.

XIX.

Where the light lyre gave many a ſoft'ning ſound,
Ravens and rooks, the birds of diſcord, dwell;
And where Society ſat ſweetly crown'd,
Eternal Solitude has fix'd her cell.

XX.

XX.

The lizard, and the lazy lurking bat,
Inhabit now, perhaps, the painted room,
Where the ſage matron and her maidens ſat,
Sweet-ſinging at the ſilver-working loom.

XXI.

The traveller's bewilder'd on a waſte;
And the rude winds inceſſant ſeem to roar,
Where, in his groves with arching arbours grac'd,
Young lovers often ſigh'd in days of yore.

XXII.

His aqueducts, that led the limpid tide
To pure canals, a chryſtal cool ſupply!
In the deep duſt their barren beauties hide:
Time's thirſt, unquenchable, has drain'd them dry!

XXIII.

Tho' his rich hours in revelry were ſpent,
With Comus, and the laughter-loving crew;
And the ſweet brow of Beauty, ſtill unbent,
Brighten'd his fleecy moments as they flew:

XXIV.

Fleet are the fleecy moments! fly they muſt;
Not to be ſtay'd by maſque, or midnight roar!
Nor ſhall a pulſe amongſt that mould'ring duſt,
Beat wanton at the ſmiles of Beauty more!

XXV.

Can the deep ſtateſman, ſkill'd in great deſign,
Protract, but for a day, precarious breath?
Or the tun'd follower of the ſacred Nine,
Sooth, with his melody, inſatiate Death?

XXVI.

No—Tho' the palace bar her golden gate,
Or monarchs plant ten thouſand guards around;
Unerring, and unſeen, the ſhaft of fate
Strikes the devoted victim to the ground!

XXVII.

What then avails Ambition's wide ſtretch'd wing,
The Schoolman's page, or pride of Beauty's bloom!
The crape-clad hermit, and the rich-rob'd king,
Levell'd lie mix'd promiſcuous in the tomb.

XXVIII.

The Macedonian monarch, wiſe and good,
Bade, when the morning's roſy reign began,
Courtiers ſhould call, as round his couch they ſtood,
"PHILIP! remember, thou'rt no more than man.

XXIX.

XXIX.

" Tho' glory ſpread thy name from pole to pole;
" Tho' thou art merciful, and brave, and juſt;
" PHILIP, reflect, thou'rt poſting to the goal,
" Where mortals mix in undiſtinguiſh'd duſt!"

XXX.

So SALADIN, for arts and arms renown'd,
(Egypt and Syria's wide domains ſubdu'd)
Returning with imperial triumphs crown'd,
Sigh'd, when the periſhable pomp he view'd:

XXXI.

And as he rode, high in his regal car,
In all the purple pride of conqueſt dreſt;
Conſpicuous, o'er the trophies gain'd in war,
Plac'd, pendent on a ſpear, his burial veſt:

XXXII.

XXXII.

While thus the herald cry'd—" This ſon of pow'r,
" This SALADIN, to whom the nations bow'd;
" May, in the ſpace of one revolving hour,
" Boaſt of no other ſpoil, but yonder ſhroud!"

XXXIII.

Search where Ambition rag'd, with rigour ſteel'd;
Where Slaughter, like the rapid lightning, ran;
And ſay, while mem'ry weeps the blood-ſtain'd field,
Where lies the chief, and where the common man?

XXXIV.

Vain are the pyramids, and motto'd ſtones,
And monumental trophies rais'd on high!
For TIME confounds them with the crumbling bones,
That mix'd in haſty graves unnotic'd lie.

XXXV.

XXXV.

Reſts not, beneath the turf, the peaſant's head,
Soft as the lord's, beneath the labour'd tomb?
Or ſleeps one colder, in his cloſe clay bed;
Than t'other, in the wide vault's dreary womb?

XXXVI.

Hither, let LUXURY lead her looſe-rob'd train;
Here flutter PRIDE, on purple-painted wings:
And, from the moral proſpect, learn—how vain
The wiſh, that ſighs for ſublunary things!

FINIS.

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